

News

Sports

Autos

Entertainment

Business

Features

Opinion

Mar



Macomb County news

[E-MAIL THIS STORY](#) | [PRINTER-FRIENDLY FORMAT](#)



[New Homes](#)

Find new commur
from top builders.

[Existing Homes](#)

Search thousands
estate listings.

[Mortgage Rates](#)

Find a mortgage l
that's right for you

News links >

[Today's stories](#)
[Metro](#)
[Wayne](#)
[Oakland](#)
[Macomb](#)
[Community Free Press](#)
[Michigan](#)
[Nation/World](#)
[Education](#)
[Children First](#)
[Politics](#)
[Casinos](#)
[Health](#)
[Religion](#)
[Obituaries](#)
[Road work](#)
[AP wire](#)
[Desiree Cooper](#)
[Brian Dickerson](#)
[More columnists](#)

Quick links >

[Home page](#)
[Site index](#)
[View the front page](#)
[Weather](#)
[Lottery](#)
[Comics](#)
[Photos](#)
[Movie listings](#)
[Restaurant guide](#)
[Search](#)
[Archives](#)
[Death notices](#)
[Personals](#)
[Auto news](#)
[Newspaper subscriptions](#)
[About the Free Press](#)
[Jobs at the Free Press](#)

Boaters' frustration up as lake levels go down

April 28, 2003

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Bad news -- again -- for Lake St. Clair.

Its water level is down once more -- a whopping 9 inches over this month last year.

This June, July and August, boaters, lakefront home owners and people who fish can expect the lake to be roughly a foot lower than last summer, said Tim Calappi, a scientist with the Army Corps of Engineers.

"That's a tremendous amount for Lake St. Clair," said Harry Bloom of Bloomfield Hills, owner of a 34 1/2-foot sailboat with a 6 1/2-foot keel. "Lake St. Clair only averages about 15 feet in depth. That leaves a lot of areas that are dramatically less than that."

What happens if lake levels drop much more?

"I think we're going to get to the point where we get out a chain saw and just cut these keels off," Bloom joked.

Property owners along the waterfront are also struggling with the shallow water.

"I couldn't get the boat in last year, which means I definitely won't be able to get the boat in this year," said Bill Teasel of Sterling Heights, who owns a house on an island in the St. Clair River delta, at the north end of the lake.

"We built a new house on the canal," Teasel said, adding it would definitely hurt his home's value.

Even the fish are disappointed -- according to the fishermen. Low water is warmer water, and fish prefer their water cold, said Dan Chimelak, owner of the Lakeside Fishing Shop in St. Clair Shores.

Lake St. Clair levels

Current readings,
compared with:

April 2002: -9 inches

Long-term average: -
13 inches

All-time high (1986):
-54 inches

All-time low (1964):
10 inches

*Source: United States
Army Corps of
Engineers*

More Macomb County r

■ [Man's body recove
Cass Lake](#)

■ [Boaters' frustration
levels go down](#)

[More stories >](#)

"As the water gets hotter, fish go out to deeper water, and you have to go farther to find them," Chimelak said. Those without boats are in worse shape, stranded high and dry on muddy banks with little water for fishing, he said.

The problem? Not enough rain and snow. Local precipitation has been below average for nine of the last 10 months, Calappi said.

"Even if we have a really wet May, it's still going to take several months of wet weather to start jumping those lake levels back up," Calappi said.

All the Great Lakes are down. Lakes Michigan and Huron are 22 inches below their long-term averages, according to the Corps of Engineers. Lake Superior is down 6 inches, Lake Erie is down 9 inches, and Lake Ontario is 4 inches below its long-term average.

But Lake St. Clair, because of its smaller size, has a greater challenge staying full than the larger lakes do, Calappi said. Larger lakes have more surrounding land from which to drain rain and snow runoff.

Meanwhile, boat owners are running out of ways to cope with the low water level.

Don Holstein of St. Clair Shores went to more trouble than most local sailboaters would in an effort to fit his 50-foot sailboat into Lake St. Clair. He removed his 9-foot blade-shaped keel and replaced it with a thin, 7 1/2-foot keel with a heavy bulb on the end, a radical change.

"I think Mother Nature is going to do her thing, and there isn't much we can do about it, except live with it," Holstein said. "The trick is getting out there. Once we're out there, we'll be all right."

He hopes so. There isn't much more he can do to give his boat a shallower draft. His options?

"Sell it," he said, laughing.

Information on lake levels is available on the Army Corps of Engineers' Web site at www.lre.usace.army.mil.

Contact PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI at 586-469-4681 or pwalsh@freepress.com.

 [email this](#) |  [print this](#)

[Home](#) [News](#) [Sports](#) [Entertainment](#) [Business](#) [Features](#) [Opinion](#) [Tech](#) [Marketplace](#)

Copyright © 2003 Detroit Free Press Inc. All rights reserved.